

I'll be quite brief tonight, first because I'm hoarse, and secondly, because you're all hungry, and thirdly, because I want to listen to the Vice President. But I want to say a few things, beginning with thank you. Thank you for being here; thank you for supporting his campaign; thank you for giving the good things that we have done these last 8 years a chance to be the springboard for positive change in America.

You know, a lot of people have forgotten that when Vice President Gore and I went out across the country in 1992, we were in the worst recession since the Great Depression. We had a lot of division in our society that was complicated by the previous administration's vetoes of the Brady bill, which is now the law, and the family and medical leave bill, which is now the law. And we asked the American people to give us a chance to put them first and to take a new direction. And the results are clear: We've had the lowest unemployment, welfare rolls, and crime rates in a generation, and the longest peacetime expansion in history.

So the question facing the American people now is not, as it is often put, do we need a change? The answer is: Yes, we do. The question is not, will we change? The question is: How are we going to change? Are you going to build on the good things that are going on in America now to face the unmet challenges of the country in the 21st century? Or will we basically go back to the approach that got us in so much trouble in the first place? That is the choice before the American people.

And I want you to know three things about Al Gore. Number one, he's done more with the job he's had the last 6½ years than any person in history, whether it was something very public and visible, like breaking the tie to give our economic plan the chance to bring the American economy back or breaking the tie to stand up for closing the gun show loophole so the background check law really works, to things that you may not see, like taking the lead in giving us the smallest Federal Government in 35 years, hooking up every classroom in this country to the Internet, managing big chunks of our foreign relations, being the main person in the administration in the drafting of the Telecommuni-

cations Act, which has already created 300,000 high-tech jobs in this country. The American people ought to know that.

The second thing that I think is very important is, he has really told you what he would do if he got to be President. And I'll let him speak for himself on that, but I think one of the principal reasons for the success we had in the last 6½ years is that I was forced to sit down and think through precisely what I would do if the American people gave me this job. And then when he joined the ticket, we sat down together, and we reissued a blueprint. He's done that in greater detail than anybody else.

The third thing I want you to know is, I believe, having done this job now, I have some sense of what it takes to succeed and who would be good at it. He has the character, the integrity, the experience, the intelligence, the energy, and the ideas necessary to lead this country into the new millennium.

He can only do it if you help him. I hope you will keep helping him, because America needs him, and I thank you for being here.

The Vice President.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:40 p.m. in the John Hay Room at the Hay-Adams Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to former Gov. Ann Richards of Texas.

Remarks on Returning Without Approval to the House of Representatives the "Taxpayer Refund and Relief Act of 1999"

September 23, 1999

Good morning. Thank you. Thank you very much. Please be seated. Thank you, and good morning. As all of you know, Congress has sent me the tax bill I have repeatedly pledged to veto. In a moment, I will do that because, at a time when America is moving in the right direction, this bill would turn us back to the failed policies of the past.

In the 12 years before I became President, irresponsible policies in Washington piled deficit upon deficit, quadrupling the national debt, leading to high interest rates, eventually bringing us the worst recession since the

Great Depression. Interest rates and unemployment were too high; wages were stagnant; growth was slow.

Vice President Gore and I came into office determined to change all that with a new economic strategy focused on fiscal discipline, expanded trade, investment in our people. The strategy has worked. In the past 6½ years, it has produced lower interest rates and ushered in the longest peacetime expansion in our history, with more than 19 million new jobs, rising wages, the lowest unemployment in a generation, and recordbreaking levels of homeownership. And by balancing the budget for the first time in a generation, we have changed red ink to black, turning a deficit of \$290 billion into a budget surplus of \$99 billion this year, with growing surpluses projected for years to come.

The American people understand that these are not simply numbers on charts. The progress we've made is something they see and feel every day in more jobs, higher paychecks, HOPE scholarships that help send their children to college, lower interest rates for owning a home and buying a car. This is the right course for our people, and our Nation. It is making a difference in the lives of Americans. And they want us to stay on it.

Our hard-won prosperity gives us, also, the chance to do something few people ever have, the chance to invest our surplus to meet the long-term challenges of America. We can lift the burden of debt from the shoulders of the next generation. We can secure the future of Social Security and Medicare. We can ensure a first-rate education and modern schools for our children.

Unfortunately, the tax bill Congress has sent me would deny those opportunities to the American people. The bill is too big, too bloated, places too great a burden on America's economy. It would force drastic cuts in education, health care, and other vital areas. It would cripple our ability to pay down the debt. It would not add a day to the Social Security Trust Fund. It would not add a day to the Medicare Trust Fund or modernize Medicare with prescription drug coverage. Nearly a trillion dollars in tax cuts, but not one dollar for Medicare. I will veto this bill because it is wrong for Medicare, wrong for

Social Security, wrong for education, and wrong for the economy.

Now, in the face of my determination to do this, many in Congress seem ready to throw in the towel. That would be a disservice to the American people. They sent us all here to get things done. And we have proved in the past, with the welfare reform bill of 1996 and the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, that we can work together to get things done and bring good results to our country. So, instead, I ask Congress not to go home until we have worked together once again, in a good-faith effort to meet the long-term challenges our people face.

First, let's reach a bipartisan agreement to save Social Security. The congressional majority's current plan and its so-called lockbox would fail to protect the Social Security surplus from being spent, and it would not add a day to the Social Security Trust Fund. Instead of this weak lockbox and no additions to the Trust Fund, I ask Congress to work with me to construct a real lockbox that would keep Social Security solvent until the year 2050.

Second, let's work together to save Medicare. With Medicare facing insolvency in just 16 years and with three out of four seniors lacking dependable, affordable prescription drug coverage, we know we must not put off this challenge. Months ago, I put forth a detailed plan for Medicare that would reform and modernize it with a voluntary prescription drug benefit. It would address the immediate, critical needs of teaching hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and other priorities, while extending Medicare's solvency to the year 2027.

Now, I don't expect the Republican majority to agree with me on every detail of my plan. I never thought that would be the case. But I do expect, and the American people have a right to expect, that we will work together in good faith to meet these long-term objectives.

Third, we should fulfill our obligations to the future by producing a real budget that pays down the debt, brings down interest rates, and makes vital investments in education, the environment, national security, biomedical research, health care, and other areas so vital to our future.

If we do this, within the framework I have outlined, we can not only invest in our future; we can pay down America's debt over the next 15 years and make our country debt-free for the first time since Andrew Jackson was here and planted that big magnolia tree in 1835.

So I say again, let's do first things first: pay down the debt; save Social Security; save and modernize Medicare; invest in education.

In the days ahead, I will ask the Republican majority to work with me to fulfill these fundamental obligations we have to our children and to our future. If we can work together to meet these objectives, we can also work together to pass tax relief we can afford, affordable, middle-class tax relief that reflects the priorities of both parties and the values of the American people. That would be a good bill I would happily sign.

Every generation of Americans is called upon to meet the challenges of its time. But few have the unprecedented opportunity we have to meet the challenges not only of our time but the great challenges of our future. We must seize that opportunity.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:10 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval the "Taxpayer Refund and Relief Act of 1999"

September 23, 1999

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning herewith without my approval H.R. 2488, the "Taxpayer Refund and Relief Act of 1999," because it ignores the principles that have led us to the sound economy we enjoy today and emphasizes tax reduction for those who need it the least.

We have a strong economy because my Administration and the Congress have followed the proper economic course over the past 6 years. We have focused on reducing deficits, paying down debt held by the public, bringing down interest rates, investing in our people, and opening markets. There is \$1.7 trillion less debt held by the public today

than was forecast in 1993. This has contributed to lower interest rates, record business investment, greater productivity growth, low inflation, low unemployment, and broad-based growth in real wages—and the first back-to-back budget surpluses in almost half a century.

This legislation would reverse the fiscal discipline that has helped make the American economy the strongest it has been in generations. By using projected surpluses to provide a risky tax cut, H.R. 2488 could lead to higher interest rates, thereby undercutting any benefits for most Americans by increasing home mortgage payments, car loan payments, and credit card rates. We must put first things first, pay down publicly held debt, and address the long-term solvency of Medicare and Social Security. My Mid-Session Review of the Budget presented a framework in which we could accomplish all of these things and also provide an affordable tax cut.

The magnitude of the tax cuts in H.R. 2488 and the associated debt service costs would be virtually as great as all of the on-budget surpluses the Congressional Budget Office projects for the next 10 years. This would leave virtually none of the projected on-budget surplus available for addressing the long-term solvency of Medicare, which is currently projected by its Trustees to be insolvent by 2015, or of Social Security, which then will be a negative cash-flow position, or for critical funding for priorities like national security, education, health care, law enforcement, science and technology, the environment, and veterans' programs.

The bill would cause the Nation to forgo the unique opportunity to eliminate completely the burden of the debt held by the public by 2015 as proposed by my Administration's Mid-Session Review. The elimination of this debt would have a beneficial effect on interest rates, investment, and the growth of the economy. Moreover, paying down debt is tantamount to cutting taxes. Each one-percentage point decline in interest rates would mean a cut of \$200 billion to \$250 billion in mortgage costs borne by American consumers over the next 10 years. Also, if we do not erase the debt held by the public, our children and grandchildren